

prevailing. In fact, there are 225 districts in the country where this interest rate is available. And for several other types of assistance, the interest rates vary from 10 to 12 per cent which I have indicated in my reply. As to giving loans without interest, that is a matter on which I cannot reply offhand here.

SHRI D. BASUMATARI: There is a report that as many as 23,000 people have been freed from bonded labour. May I know what steps have been taken, whether any scheme has been drawn up, to rehabilitate them?

SHRI PRANAB KUMAR MUKHERJEE: I have indicated in the reply that there are various schemes like sheep breeding, poultry farming etc. If the hon. Members are interested in knowing the details as to which banks have taken up what types of schemes and how many people are being provided with assistance, I will be glad to give that information to them.

SHRI HARI KISHORE SINGH: I am glad to learn of the steps which Government have taken to help the bonded labour which has been freed. I hope the Minister is aware that in the rural areas the nationalised banks have a distance limit of 8 k.m. for extending credit facilities. If so, may I know how these people who are dispersed all over the countryside are going to be covered by this assistance? Is there any proposal to do away with this distance limit?

SHRI PRANAB KUMAR MUKHERJEE: In the rural areas there are three agencies providing credit to the rural population, namely the branches of the commercial banks, co-operative societies and the new established regional rural banks, but we do admit, and I have said it on many occasions on the floor of the House, that in spite of our total effort, there is a big gap and it is our constant effort to see in what way we can bridge that gap (Interruptions).

MR. SPEAKER: Next question.

Sick Tea Gardens

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*169. **SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA:**

SHRI VIRBHADRA SINGH:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government had decided to take over the management of sick tea gardens;

(b) if so, the broad features thereof; and

(c) what steps have been taken in that direction?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYAYA):

(a) to (c). Steps have been taken to introduce a Bill in the current session to amend the Tea Act, 1953 to provide for taking over management of sick tea gardens.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA: What about parts (b) and (c) of the question?

PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYAYA: So far as the broad features of the Bill are concerned, I would like to say . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Will it not be in the Bill?

PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYAYA: Yes.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA: Then I cannot ask any question because everything will be in the Bill.

MR. SPEAKER: Has the Bill been introduced?

PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYAYA: No. We have approached the Lok Sabha Secretariat for giving time for its introduction. Steps have been taken to introduce it.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA: He was going to indicate the broad features when you stopped him.

MR. SPEAKER: Can you give the broad features?

PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYAYA: I can give the broad features of the recommendations of the Committee on the basis of which this Bill has been framed, but not necessarily reflecting what is in the Bill. So, I have answered this question in a different form. I can briefly indicate not what is in the Bill but what is in the recommendations of the Committee.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA: That we know.

I would at least seek some confirmation or contradiction from him of various press reports which have appeared so far. Of course, I welcome the fact that there is going to be a legislation, long long overdue. I would like to know whether Government is thinking of providing for the take-over of the actual management of these taken-over tea gardens by the Centre or by the respective State Governments within whose jurisdiction those gardens are located? There is also a report to the effect that Government proposes that after these sick tea gardens have been nursed back to health, they would be handed over to the original owners. I want to know what is the position regarding these two important matters.

PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYAYA: About the second position, I would like to submit first that there is no idea of the Government to hand over all the gardens after nursing them back to health. As regards the first point, our view is that if the State Governments set up some corporations which are competent to look after these gardens—as there is one, for instance, in Assam—we will be glad to entrust responsibility to them. But where there are no such organizations, we will entrust responsibility to some other public sector corporations, and if necessary, suitable private sector corporations as well.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA: Even before this legislation has seen the light of day, we find that quite considerable financial assistance being provided by Government to many of these tea gardens, particularly those which are located in what is called zone 3. Now, I would like to know how much money has been given to these tea gardens, private tea gardens during the last three years, and on what account, they have been given and for what purpose? I would also like to know whether Government has got any kind of machinery or any monitoring system to know exactly how these tea garden owners have been spending that money?

PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYAYA: The question is on the management of the sick tea gardens and the proposed take over of the same. The question which the hon. Member has asked pertains to the money given, the quantum given and the purpose for which it is given. I will be glad to answer the question if a separate notice is given.

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DAS MUNSI: Since the Minister had just now stated that these tea gardens will be taken through a legislation in the current session, may I know from the hon. Minister whether Government has taken sufficient care to look into the matter. Already, there are some sick units which are in the list and the management of the units have started withdrawing important machinery and plants, including the diesel engines. I would like to know whether the Government is aware of it and is keen to take over the units? May I know whether the Government will immediately make security arrangement to prevent the possibility of things being destroyed? Since the Government is taking the management of those gardens, may I know from the Government whether the employees belonging to those gardens—in the secretariat cadre, in the managerial cadre—will be protected by a legislation?

PROF. D. P. CHATTOPODHYAYA: Appropriate steps are being taken to see that the remaining assets of the closed tea gardens are not taken away or misused or plundered in any way. Secondly, I would say, yes, that the labour and other staff of the closed mills would be given first preference for absorption when they are re-opened.

DR. RANEN SEN: A little while ago, the hon. Minister had stated the three positions, that is, either the State Governments will form a corporation and take them over or the Central Government may take them over or a private tea garden corporation will take them over. May I know, in this connection, whether it is a fact that some tea garden owners are trying to form a corporation and are trying to pressurise the Government so that Government falls in line with them and hand over those tea gardens after their having been modernised? I want to know whether it is a fact or not? I also want to know whether such a proposal is before the Government or not?

PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYAYA: This is not a fact. The question of pressurising is absolutely unfounded and Government is not amenable to such pressures. My colleague, the Minister, a few minutes ago, had stated that we have taken over more than 100 mills. So, if we could resist pressure, if there is any, at all in the textile sector, we are quite capable of resisting pressure, if any, elsewhere. But the point is that a private sector company has been formed. They are ready to take the responsibility on no-profit-no-loss basis. This is one of the alternatives. We have applied our mind and our approach is quite flexible.

MR. SPEAKER: Next Question.

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DAS MUNSI: The Minister has already said that there is a private sector

corporation and they may think of that alternative. This is a game of the tea garden owners in that area. I hail from that area. It is their trick. We wanted to have a categorical answer but the Government could not give.

Trade Fairs

*171. **SHRI ARJUN SETHI:** Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) the names of foreign countries where 'Trade Fairs' were organised during the year 1975-76;

(b) the total amount, in term of foreign exchange earned or orders received by India in those trade fairs; and

(c) whether Government propose to hold any international trade fair in the country in the near future?

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI VISHWANATH PRATAP SINGH):

(a) During the year 1975-76, Indian Trade Exhibitions and participation in International Trade Fairs were organised in the following 17 countries by the Directorate of Exhibitions and Commercial Publicity and the Indian Council of Trade Fairs and Exhibitions: Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Dubai, France, Federal Republic of Germany, German Democratic Republic, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Libya, Poland, New Zealand, South Korea, Thailand, Yugoslavia and Zambia.

(b) According to reports received from the participating firms, orders amounting to about Rs. 259 million were secured at these exhibitions and fairs.

(c) The question of holding International Trade Fairs in the country is under examination.